

CLUES ARE SOUGHT ON LOST AMERICAN

Friends Believe Thompson
Was Abducted in Malaysia

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BANGKOK, Thailand—Friends and business associates of John W. Thompson are piecing together evidence to suggest that he is not lost in the Malaysian jungle but has been abducted.

Mr. Thompson, a 61-year-old American who lived here and who made a fortune selling Thai silk, was last seen on the afternoon of Sunday, March 26, at a bungalow in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, a resort area.

An intensive search—involving the Malaysian police, units of the British Army, close friends including Brig. Gen. Edwin F. Black of the United States Army and hundreds of volunteers—has failed to find Mr. Thompson. Rewards offered for information about him now total \$12,000.

The police have worked on the theory that the American businessman went for a walk and got lost. Those who favor the abduction theory believe that Mr. Thompson was seized by someone whom he had arranged to meet, or by that person's agents. They offer these points in support of that theory:

¶Mr. Thompson was a chain smoker. Yet he supposedly went for a walk leaving his cigarettes and lighter in the bungalow.

¶The missing man suffered from a gall-bladder ailment that caused frequent and severe spasms that "doubled him up in agony" according to a friend. "Jim would not under any circumstances have left the house for any length of time without taking his pills," a friend said. Yet the pills were left.

¶A body is not usually difficult to find in the jungle. Vultures gather above it. The tracking dogs used by the police are attracted by the smell.

Spasm Called Possible

These points do not rule out the possibility that Mr. Thompson was seized with a spasm, lost his footing and fell into a cleft in the hills or over a ledge.

In many places the jungle is impenetrable. Malays discovered only recently the wreckage of a United States Air Force C-47 that crashed in the jungle in 1947. The plane fell only a few miles from a main road. Yet it went undiscovered for 20 years.

Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Connie Mangskau, an old friend, set off from Penang for the Cameron Highlands on March 23 in a taxi.

The taxi halted at a ferry. A man appeared and spoke to the driver. The driver stepped out of the taxi, making way for the newcomer. He explained that he was the original driver's brother and that the driver "has something to do today, so I will drive you."

The taxi drove on to Tappa, a road junction at the foot of the hills leading to the Highlands. Mrs. Mangskau noticed a red warning light on the dashboard. The driver said the car was overheated and drove it into a garage. After inspection he said that he could not possibly drive the car up the hills and suggested that Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Mangskau use a taxi standing nearby.

Two men were sitting in the other taxi in addition to the driver. After some discussion—heated, on Mrs. Mangskau's part—the two men got out and the visitors continued their trip to the Highlands. Neither thought much of the incident at the time. Friends wonder: Was it an abduction attempt that misfired?

On the Sunday afternoon that Mr. Thompson disappeared, a worker at the garage in Tappa noticed five cars bearing Thai license plates going up the road to the Highlands at about 3:30 P. M. They were a black Chevrolet, a Cortina with a white top and a maroon body, two Volkswagens and a Volkswagen bus. At 5:30 P. M., after Mr. Thompson was last seen at the bungalow, the five cars returned down the mountain road.

Those who are interested in the abduction theory also recall Mr. Thompson's last moments at the bungalow.

Money or Politics?

Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Mangskau—with Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Ling, their hosts—had a picnic lunch after attending church. When they returned to the bungalow, all except Mr. Thompson decided to take a nap.

Soon afterward the Lings, who occupied a bedroom facing out onto a gravel drive, heard a steel chair being moved across the drive. Mr. Ling remarked to his wife, Helen, "I guess Jim is going to have a sunbath."

Half an hour later they both heard the chair being put back, and footsteps crunching along the gravel. The Lings insist that the footsteps were Mr. Thompson's. If so, that was the last that was heard of him.

Why should anyone abduct James Wilson Thompson?

He was rich, but no demand for ransom has been received.

To some, a political motivation seems more reasonable. Mr. Thompson first came to Thailand as an agent of the United States Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency. At one time he knew and liked Pridi Phanomyong, a postwar Prime Minister of Thailand who had worked for the agency against the Japanese. Mr. Pridi has been in exile in Communist China since 1950.

Moving an abducted man out of Malaysia presents no problem. There have been persistent reports that unidentified aircraft fly to landing strips in Malaysia built in isolated areas by the British during their campaign against the Communists in the nineteen-fifties. The Malaysian Government denies the existence of these strips and of the flights. But Australians and British sources say the strips exist.